

## Cultural Management Development Program

2009



Project

### **'Improving organisational performance through visitor feedback'**

*"Currently this is not a fool proof system - i.e. if you receive a complaint it should be copied and have a copy sent to the CEO's PA - I don't think many people know this"*

*"KPI's are dumbed down for governance requirements and annual reports as statistics, and always presented in a positive manner with contextual justifiable explanations, about the shop, research, directions for staff training, general facilities....."*

*"So what happens to all the good stuff, the positive comments we don't see? What happens to them?"*

*"What ever you do, it needs to be formal and holistic at the same time so everyone is happy with the results"*

Charles Darwin once said:

*"it's not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change'.*

Cultural Management Development Program 2009

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Improving organisational performance through visitor feedback

**Executive Summary**

The Visitor Improving Performance team (Team VIP) consists of: Barbra Wilson—Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, Tim Shields—National Archives of Australia, Jo Lansdowne—Questacon Denise Officer—National Gallery of Australia, James Backhouse—National Film and Sound Archive

*Research aims*

*To research and address current practices to strengthen the quality, quantity and management of visitor feedback received by cultural institutions.*

*To provide*

Enhanced visitor experience

Clearer understanding of visitor expectations

Streamlining processes that allows staff to deal effectively with feedback

Increased communication within and between the institutions

Visitors and staff contributing to improving the institutions' services

A uniformed process for collecting, researching and processing data

*Methodological Approach*

Interviews were held with front of house staff, visitor' services, marketing, governance, security and management staff.

Informants: the National Gallery of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, QUESTACON, the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Film and Sound Archive, the Australian War Memorial, the National Portrait Gallery.

*Findings*

Visitor feedback - institutions have their core business outcomes focused on public satisfaction, development of knowledge and understanding, and accessibility to the institutions' collection. They all recognised the importance of visitor feedback in achieving this core business outcome.

Our findings showed there are a myriad of ways of collecting feedback. For example, market surveys, observation, exit and entry surveys, online forms, verbal, written, unsolicited, complaints, service charters, visitors' books etc

Current practices used to manage visitor feedback found that each institution has a unique plan of gathering, processing and managing this information. In most cases Outreach programs, Marketing, Education, Visitor Services and Visitor Programs look after their own feedback.

Many staff consider visitor feedback management to be peripheral to their job. It is time consuming and perceived not to be central to their task of delivering programs that display and enhance the collection. Feedback data is not shared, analysed or compared institution by institution or internally section by section.

Visitor feedback was found to be rarely provided to all staff and appears only in formal reports. Some institutions are developing visitor feedback processes and some institutions have quite sophisticated systems. Those in development were keen to see that this project was underway.

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*Recommendations*

1. A dedicated budget to allow for Centralised Management of feedback – including a “Visitor’s Experience Manager” in each Institution
2. Provide staff training together with individual performance agreements. Staff should be afforded contact with professionals to understand the importance of the visitor experience, and, how this fits into the business plans of the institution
3. Provide stakeholder training
4. Adopt the VIP Business Flow Chart – Best Practice (see below)
5. Implement regular and timely reviews to track improved performance with a feedback loop

Improving organisational performance through visitor feedback

**Introduction**

The focus of the project sponsored by Mark Nash, Business Manager of the National Portrait Gallery is 'to better understand how to manage the plethora of feedback received from visitors to cultural organisations and how to extract value for both the visitor and the organisation.'

The Visitor Improving Performance team (Team VIP) consists of:  
Barbra Wilson—Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House  
Tim Shields—National Archives of Australia  
Jo Lansdowne—Questacon  
Denise Officer—National Gallery of Australia  
James Backhouse—National Film and Sound Archive  
(See attachment A for full details)

**Research aims**

The project aims to research and review current practices in order to strengthen the quality, quantity and management of visitor feedback received by cultural institutions.

This research will provide recommendations on:

- Guidelines to manage feedback
- A model of best practice

The benefits to cultural institutions that strengthen strategies and improve efficiencies will be:

- Enhanced visitor experience
- Clearer understanding of visitor expectations
- Streamlining processes that allows staff to deal effectively with feedback
- Increased communication within and between the institutions
- Accountability with transparent record keeping
- Reporting systems that identify trends
- Allows visitors and staff to contribute to improving the institutions' services
- Support for the planning and maintenance of continuous quality improvement

**Approach**

The approach involved team members contributing their perspective and experience, researching cultural institutions and third party publications, consultation, collection and analysis of findings. The final step was the development of recommendations, the production of a project report and a presentation.

Initial research covered the review of the team member's knowledge of current methods for the collection of visitor feedback. This provided the foundation for the planning of the consultation process. Stakeholders were identified and allocated to groups of two within the team. The team determined how the institutions would be approached, who would be consulted, what information would be collected, analysed and how the findings would be recorded. To ensure consistency of analysis a uniformed process for collecting, researching and processing data was put in place. This included the development of a comprehensive questionnaire of 24 questions that broadly covered how feedback is currently collected and managed. There was flexibility within

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the questionnaire to allow for variations between institutions and personal follow up after the initial consultation.

*(Attachment B consolidated responses to questionnaire)*

Stakeholders consulted varied between institutions and interviews were held with front of house staff, visitor services staff, marketing, governance, security and management. *(Attachment C)*

Questionnaire responses were uploaded onto the team's Wiki site for analysis. The results were compared and areas of commonality and variations were identified. A best practice framework was constructed and recommendations were drafted.

## **Findings**

The following key areas were investigated within the seven cultural institutions interviewed:

1. Visitor feedback
2. Market and exit surveys
3. Service Charters
4. Current practices used to manage visitor feedback

### **1. Visitor Feedback**

The research found all interviewed institutions have their core business outcomes focused on the public satisfaction, development of knowledge and understanding, and accessibility to the institution's collection. They all recognised the importance of visitor feedback in achieving this core business outcome.

Most of the institutions interviewed displayed a consistent lack of follow through of submitted visitors' feedback. This may be a result of inaccurate documentation, inconsistent feedback, a low level of detail in feedback and poor feedback management practice. Some staff members interviewed exhibited disinterest or viewed the task as a low priority.

Visitor feedback was found to be rarely provided to all staff within institutions. This is an issue that institutions have recognised that needs to be addressed in order to support and track continuous improvement.

### **2. Market surveys and exit surveys**

Our research showed that there are many ways of collecting feedback within institutions.

These include: Formative evaluation, summative, observational, exits and entry, online, verbal and real world, written, random, complaints and service charters.

Many institutions have a number of teams that collect data separately through surveys and are not coordinated from a whole of organization point of view for maximum benefit.

In most cases each area looks after its own feedback for example; Outreach programs, Marketing, Education, Visitor Services and Visitor Programs.

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Many surveys are pro-active asking for information such as: are we meeting the needs of special groups of people? Are we getting our messages across? They are tick and flick surveys with room to comment – mostly wanting information that is negative or positive and statistical.

It was found that some exhibitions/galleries were not analyzed prior to development - largely, this is a consequence of the curator's perspective and premise and gut reaction. However, some institutions have a very effective evaluation process during an exhibition and pre-development.

These surveys/evaluations are wide in scope and produce reliable and valid information. This evaluation starts at the beginning of the project and tests the ideas with the audience. The evaluation continues through out the life of the exhibition. In some instances, the visitors are tested during the exhibition to see if themes, styles, layouts etc are working. This is allowing some institutions to gain up to date knowledge and embrace the visitor's opinions and ideas to effect change. Consultants are generally used as they are quick with the data entry and the analysis.

In addition to improving organisational performance, the information collected from surveys may be used for annual reports, council reports, awards programs and the Government through the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics are suggesting that there is a uniform collection method for all Institutions so there can be consistent reporting against measures and other indicators.

### **3. Service charters**

Our research found that all interviewed institutions either had or were developing charters; however it was clear that many required a process to ensure follow through back to the visitor and staff.

Many Service Charter feedback forms were not available at point of service locations. When available they are sometimes long and confusing to read, not targeted well, not reviewed regularly and information that is obtained is often not acted upon. Some are active and online. These shortcomings impact on institutions as visitors are less likely to fill in Service Charter feedback forms.

From an institutional point of view, Service Charter feedback forms were found to be time consuming to process and report on the information. In the majority of cases studied, there was little action taken on information collected unless the visitor had a specific complaint and 'some one' was dedicated to the particular complaint, feedback resolution.

The results of information collected as feedback from the Service Charter feedback forms in most cases was not communicated regularly if at all to staff.

### **4. Current practices**

All interviewed institutions have a unique plan for gathering, processing and managing this information.

Practices communicated to the Team showed that cultural institutions are aware of the benefits of visitor feedback, but most are unsure how this information is managed or is to be managed and acted upon. They are not using this information efficiently or effectively.

This creates problems within the internal culture of the institution: some staff considers visitor feedback to be peripheral to their job. It is sometimes a subject of avoidance and there is no staffs 'buy in'.

Each institution and some sections within, process their own information, thus creating a non uniform set of data. (The data collected is usually in the form of paper or electronic databases) This data is not shared, analysed or compared Institution by Institution or section by section.

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This unstructured or fragmented practice within the organisations contributes to poor decision making processes as well as reactive management of feedback.

The research has also shown that there is a lack of accountability and traceability with little follow up to confirm if action was taken on specific visitor feedback.

Fragmented decisions are being made about similar issues or concerns and difficulty has arisen in analysing and implementing findings within general staff duties.

Staff have shown to have limited confidence in some strategies applied especially qualitative research that challenges their beliefs, knowledge and assumptions which adds to the low level of interest from staff regarding visitor feedback.

All Institutions have room for development of a system that allows this to happen i.e. compatible and comparable data moving between organisations internally and externally enabling ease in sharing information. This would go in some way to closing a gap in communication, creating efficiencies in data handling and its use, towards the improvement of organisational performance.

Organisations have shown little interest in the value of personal and professional development in training staff in collecting and handling feedback in all its forms. Generating interest in and the importance of feedback is a challenge that was apparent for all organisations.

Although newer organisations are developing processes, there needs to be time to regularly review, develop and upgrade any systems developed to effect positive growth and change.

### **Recommendations**

In consideration of the above findings and taking into account the complexity of business flow within the cultural organisations, Team VIP provide the following recommendations focused on strengthening organisational performance utilising visitor feedback.

These recommendations are introduced as **guidelines and a business process flowchart** that support and complement each other.

This will enable organisations to customise a preferred practice model and consider implementing a VIP (Visitors Improving Performance) business process for addressing visitor feedback.

### **Guidelines**

These guidelines can be used to build a preferred practice to meet the needs of the organisation and allow for the natural evolution determined by the requirements of each organisation. We suggest the following:

1. Dedicated Budget
2. Centralised Management of feedback – with A Dedicated “Visitors Experience Manager” in each Institution
3. Stakeholders and staff buy in
4. Review and Innovation

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**1. Dedicated Budget**

A dedicated budget ensures resources to capture and manage feedback

- within each organisation and
- within and between cultural organisations i.e. centralised feedback

As cultural organisations budget and performance efficiency ratings are required to be met it would be complementary, cost effective and efficient to implement these recommendations with centralised management.

**2. Centralised Management of feedback– with a dedicated “Visitors Experience Manager” in each Institution**

A centralised management of feedback would include:

A dedicated **“Visitor’s Experience Manager”** to deal with all aspects of visitor feedback that feeds through to all cultural organisations.

A guide to implementing this is by incorporating a standardised and centralised electronic database (your institution may have a system in place already for ticketing etc) and management tools that all organisations have security privileges to.

This will allow instant access to data and improve record keeping techniques, accountability, transparency and accuracy of reports.

The sharing resources would include:

- production of feedback forms
- collection and analysis
- communications and reporting

This position would be in charge of contributing to the centralised feedback system, directly liaising with colleagues in the same role in cultural organisations, as well as performing the day to day operations of their own position including driving the process of continuous improvement. Appointing a Visitor’s Experience Manager in each Institution will optimise the collection of visitor feedback and ensure that results are communicated widely and understood.

The tools to manage the feedback data will require an interface. A database platform that allows the recording and cataloguing of feedback received.

**3. Staff and stakeholder buy in**

Senior management will be required to be formally and holistically proactive in the implementation of the system and the ultimate delivery of all requirements adjusted to suit the myriad of reporting and governance requirements.

Management should offer the opportunity to staff to acquire new personal and interpersonal skills in the welcoming, reception and the acknowledgement of feedback that is integral to the Visitors Improving Performance process.

Staff should be afforded direct contact with professionals in the field of visitor feedback to understand the importance of the visitor, and their experience, and, how this fits into the business plans of the institution and why we want the visitor to experience excellent customer service. Training staff in the theories of feedback

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will allow them to implement the theory in practice, and have a sense of personal and professional achievement.

Behavioural requirements can be negotiated and imbedded in a staff member's Individual performance agreement, much like the standard OHS requirements.

Scheduling of regular staff meetings focused on visitor feedback, whether, electronic, public domain, or personal and verbal, as praise, or as constructive criticism, will ensure staff feel valued and informed.

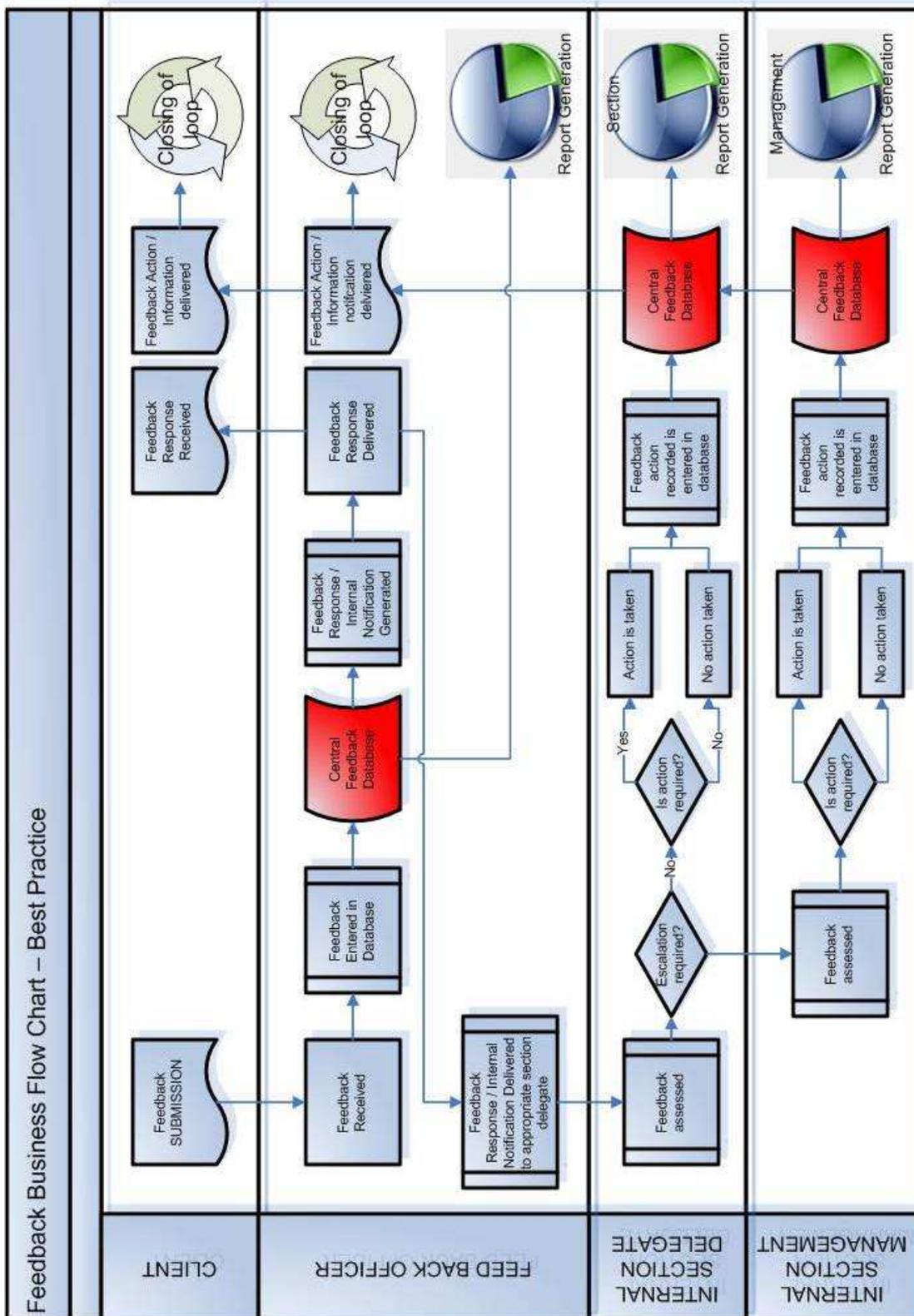
**4. Review and Innovation**

Over time staff and the public will become aware of the process of visitor feedback and review that leads to continual improvement of customer service. They will be given the opportunity to liaise with the central feedback system and review the way visitor feedback is managed and implemented.

In addition Management should be active in directing the results of visitor feedback throughout the institutions and implementing changes arising from the new feedback system into strategic plans.

Review of all the recently adopted VIP processes should be undertaken each year with calls for public participation widely advertised via all forms of communication, e.g., paper, electronic and verbal.

Business Flow Chart – Best Practice



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**Conclusion**

In an ideal world there would be a dedicated sectional position that administers and sits within the Executive Management team (e.g. AWM and the NGA), for the physical implementation of a process that administers visitor feedback towards enhancing the organisations performance.

Initially and with budget constraints considered, a committee of sectional staff could roll out the framework and encourage collaborative participation until management secures resources

As team VIP, we have tried to consider the impact of a new system in an organisation, from the extra time required to introduce and manage; to the acceptance by the staff and visitors and the ripple effect that will vary in strength and distance.

Noting in the beginning within the instigating facilities, that there will be negative aspects, e.g. lack of interest and enthusiasm by staff and visitors, sabotage, and that other elements 'things' will be discovered unintentionally as the system is implemented.

'We have tried to create an idea / concept that can be the system, or contribute favourably to a system, that impacts widely and can produce change for the better, while realising that one size does not fit all and some elements will not as useful or adaptive as others.

With the uptake of a version of the VIP system each Cultural Institution could be mandated to work collaboratively with other national collecting institutions to explore operational efficiencies through shared frame work or services such as this.

Team VIP considers that this project has been time well spent and it has been worth striving for the result provided in the time allocated.

We think that we have produced a process that can enhance customer satisfaction and drive continual improvement.

## ***Glossary***

### **Best Practice**

**Definition:** Methods and techniques that have consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and which are used as benchmarks to strive for. There is, however, no practice that is best for everyone or in every situation, and no best practice remains best for very long as people keep on finding better ways of doing things.

### **Feedback (from Wikipedia)**

**Definition:** **Feedback** describes the situation when output from (or [information](#) about the result of) an event or [phenomenon](#) in the past will influence the same event/phenomenon in the present or future. When an event is part of a chain of [cause-and-effect](#) that forms a circuit or loop, then the event is said to "*feed back*" into itself.

**The Service charter:** A Service Charter is a simple public document, developed in consultation with staff and customers that continually grows with an organisation. It sets out the standards of service customers can expect. A Charter is a strong performance measurement and accountability tool as it focuses on customer service outcomes.

### **Feedback collected by**

Visitor's books

Suggestion boxes

Kiosks

Qualitative and Quantitative Surveys

Verbal & real world communications

Non solicited mail

Formative evaluation

Summative evaluation

Observational

Exits and entry surveys

Online

Written

Random sampling

Complaints

Service charters

**Attachment A**

Visitors Improving Feedback team VIP members

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**Attachment B**

Consolidation of questionnaire responses is available on request

**Attachment C**

Institutions and personnel identified and consulted

**National Portrait Gallery**

Mark Nash Project Sponsor

**National Film and Sound Archive**

Blythe Guilfoyle Public Programs Co-ordinator

Morgan Philips Exhibition Co-ordinator

**National Gallery of Australia**

Helen Gee Head Governance and reporting

Craig Sullivan Manager Security

Peter Naumann Head Education and Public Programs

Kirsten Downie Head Marketing and Communications

**QUESTACON**

Dom O'Conner Visitor Services Manager

Cassie Powell Marketing and Media

Jane Coultas Visitor Services Administration Support

**National Archives of Australia**

Zoe Darcey Director Public Programs

**Australian War Memorial**

Linda Ferguson

**Museum of Australian Democracy**

Michael Evans – Manager, Visitor Experience

Jenny Morley – Manager, Visitor Services and Volunteers, Visitor Experience

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**Attachment D**

Relevant excerpts from business plans noting a variety of deliverables and process from, KPIS, Goals, Objectives, Complaints handling procedures, Service charters, How and Achievements that have reference to this project.

Full documents are available from each informant institutions website

**1. National Gallery of Australia**

Annual Business Plan - a tabled explanation of how this is done

Strategy → Actions → what program area is responsible → Targets / measure → KPI

Goal 2:

Objective

KPI 2.3 Level of visitor and stakeholder satisfaction with key exhibitions  
(Measured by marketing) attach document as reference or hyperlink

KPI 2.13 level of satisfaction with student and teacher programs  
(Measured by Education and Public Programs)

KPI 2.16 Stakeholder feedback concerning Gallery profile and brand  
(Measured by Marketing)

Goal 3: Create a welcoming and engaging visitor experience

Objective 3.1 Provide high quality visitor services and facilities

KPI 3.1 Level of satisfaction with visitor services as measured by audience survey and feedback (service charter)

**2. National Film and Sound Archive**

KPI's (from business plan) are

Service charter obligations met 100%

Survey records high level of satisfaction 95%

and the Service charter is relevant because:

Reporting on NFSA services standards

The NFSA will monitor its performance against its service standards and will report on performance against them in the Annual Report, including the number and nature of complaints received and action taken"

**3. National Archives of Australia**

The measurement of KPI is not entirely based on the visitor feedback. Visitor feedback is generally only used to prove that the cultural institution is meeting the requirements of the organisational outcome number 2. This is positive outcome is reached with 5% increase in visitor attendance and 90% satisfaction is reached with the feedback data collected. (This is focused on whether there is better understanding of heritage and democracy.)

Quote: Page 19 "National Archives of Australia and National Archives of Australia Advisor Council Annual Report"

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The National Archives of Australia produces a publication on the Annual Reports. Performance reporting in this annual report is based on the outcome and output structure set out in the 2007-08 Portfolio Statements and the 2007-08 Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements.

The Archives has two outcomes and three outputs. This report on performance between the planned targets in the Portfolio Budget Statements and Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements, and the actual results achieved by the Archives in 2007-08.

**OUTCOME 2**

Australians have access to a national archival collection that assists them to understand their heritage and democracy

Achievement of Outcome 2 will be evident if visitors to the Archives and users of the Archives' products and services gain a deeper or different awareness of an aspect of Australian heritage or democracy. The best measure this is likely to be via surveys of users and visitors. Success will be demonstrated if, over time, 75 per cent of those surveyed gain show such awareness.

In 2007-08, a number of different evaluation tools were used to measure the effectiveness of the diverse activities under Outcome 2. The Archives is continuing to assess whether a more rigorous methodology to measure progress towards achieving Outcome 2 is possible and cost-effective.

**4. QUESTACON**

Questacon Strategic Plan 2008 - 2013

Action strategy 2

Core capabilities

Inspirational visitor experiences

Deliver creative and dynamic exhibitions and programs to increase enthusiasm for science

Renew infrastructure and develop facilities to ensure quality visitor experience

Ensure equity of access

How: Digital technologies allow broader experiences with science, innovation and technology both at the Centre and post-visit

Result: A greater understanding of the ways in which people engage with and learn science

Questacon increases its audience by offering more self-directed, casual, outdoor experiences. Visits offer a more diverse range of experiences

Questacon allows visitors to add content to visits, becomes a hub for visitors to find answers to their own questions and offers experiences that stretch beyond visits to the Centre

Action Strategy 3

Core capabilities:

Continually improve governance and business processes to ensure an efficient and effective organisation which is financially and intellectually sustainable

How: Establishment of a rigorous, strategic evaluation and research strategy

Result: Questacon's business processes are aligned with the rest of the Department, facilitating collaboration towards achievement of key goals

Informed, evidence based decision making processes supported by a responsive staffing structure

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**5. Australian War Memorial**

**Very large document, link provided**

[http://www.awm.gov.au/about/AWM Business Plan 09 10.pdf](http://www.awm.gov.au/about/AWM_Business_Plan_09_10.pdf)

**6. National Portrait Gallery**

<http://www.portrait.gov.au/UserFiles/file/Corporate%20Plan%202008%20-%202011.pdf>

**Performance measure**

Positive feedback from visitors, staff and other stakeholders

**Attachment E**

Bibliography

NGA Service charter is for feedback not complaints

<http://nga.gov.au/AboutUs/charter.cfm>

NGA complaints handling

<http://nga.gov.au/AboutUs/complaints.cfm>

[http://www.nfsa.gov.au/about\\_us/docs/NFSA\\_Service\\_Charter.pdf](http://www.nfsa.gov.au/about_us/docs/NFSA_Service_Charter.pdf)

From website: Any feedback? Please send to [access@nfsa.gov.au](mailto:access@nfsa.gov.au).

<http://www.tourism-intelligence.co.uk/FileAccess.aspx?id=252>

[http://www.intercom.museum/conferences/2002/munro\\_beeson.html](http://www.intercom.museum/conferences/2002/munro_beeson.html)

On leadership and visitor orientation and staff involvement

<http://www.warringah.nsw.gov.au/publications/documents/STRPL510.pdf>

It is essential that complaints are resolved quickly

Accept responsibility for the problem and take immediate action to remedy the situation and give the customer an acceptable timeframe for when things will be fixed. A problem that takes weeks or months to resolve will not inspire repeat business so, wherever possible, give your staff the authority to resolve minor complaints on the spot.

<http://www.etsautilities.com.au/public/download.jsp?id=8495>

General Head document on delivering power to customers *"We will do everything in our power to deliver yours"*

<http://www.guidedogswa.com/docs/Quality%20Service%20Improvement%20Policy%20and%20Procedure.doc>

Has good material on process and respond and analyse that could be used as an example for a cultural institution. Context is similar to VIP flow chart.

[http://www.atpl.net.au/data/sample/pdf/atpsample\\_16220.pdf](http://www.atpl.net.au/data/sample/pdf/atpsample_16220.pdf)

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Exhibition-Evaluation/>

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/Audience-Research-visitor-behaviour/>

<http://archive.amol.org.au/evrsig/>

<http://archive.amol.org.au/evrsig/pdf/EVR-visitor-profile.pdf>

Questions to ask

<http://archive.amol.org.au/evrsig/pdf/Audres-exsum.pdf>

audience research in the Australian cultural heritage sector with the aims –to provide a better understanding of the current practice, acceptance, integration and impact of audience research in the Australian cultural Heritage sector and–to determine best practice and to make suggestions for improvements

<http://archive.amol.org.au/evrsig/pdf/mprpap.pdf>

explains an integrated approach within an institution and a look at the future to 2025

**Attachment F**

OTHER Reading Reference material

Wiki - Questacon Visitor and complaint handling

Wiki - Audience development planning matrix

Wiki- NGA report of key indicators of people who visit the NGA, why they visit and the level of satisfaction with the NGA experience

Wiki- Australian War Memorial Exhibition Development Policy  
(principles of which are set out in the Gallery Master Plan that include audience advocacy and evaluation, definitions of audience and desired impact of messages, communications objectives to the visitor experience and recommendations of evaluation)

Documents from the Australian Bureau of Statistics

ABA4916.0 towards Comparable Standards for Cultural Institutions 2008

ABA 4915.0.55.002 Arts and Cultural Heritage – An Information Dev